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Asia - Vietnam

More convictions

Three bloggers get jail terms for “abusing democratic freedoms”

17 February 2015

Reporters Without Borders condemns the sentences ranging from 12 to 18 months in prison that a people’s court in the southern province of Dong Nai imposed last week on three bloggers – Le Thi Phuong Anh, Do Nam Trung and Pham Minh Vu – under criminal code article 258, which penalizes “abusing democratic freedoms.”

The sentences, passed on 12 February, were clearly unjust and violated freedom of information and expression.

Arrested while covering an anti-Chinese demonstration by South China Sea oil rig workers on 15 May, they were accused in connection with their Facebook posts (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) about anti-Chinese protests and China’s violations of Vietnam’s territorial waters.

The issue often gives rise to accusations by members of the public that Vietnam’s ruling Communist Party is too lax with China. In its verdict, the court said the bloggers had used their Facebook account to “disseminate content (articles and photos) that incited and led to anti-state demonstrations.”

Ruling that a total of 157 posts had “insulted the prestige of the state and Communist Party and undermined the trust of the people, especially workers, students and young people, in the Party,” the court sentenced Anh, Trung and Vu to 12, 14 and 18 months in prison respectively.

“We strongly condemn the court’s verdict and call for the immediately release of these jailed citizen-journalists,” said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

“These harsh sentences show that the Communist Party does not fear the consequences of its violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights. To put pressure on the authorities, we urge the international community to react and to demand the release of all bloggers and citizen-journalists imprisoned in Vietnam.”

The authorities also confiscated two motorcycles, several mobile phones and cash from the bloggers, whose sentences reflect the increasingly tough line being taken by the authorities and their frequent use of article 258 to jail independent news providers.

The same article was used to strip the newspaper *Nguoi Cao Tuoi* (Elderly People) of its licence on 7 January and initiate proceedings against its editor, **Kim Quoc Hoa**, who is facing possible dismissal. Hoa has received threats from the highest government level in the past in connection with his coverage of corruption involving senior officials.

Vietnam, which is ranked 175nd out of 180 countries in the [2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), saw its situation deteriorate in 2014.
